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# Thermodynamic Study for Conformal Phase in Large $N_f$ Gauge Theory

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We investigate the chiral phase transition at finite temperature ( $T$ ) in colour  $SU(N_c = 3)$  Quantum Chromodynamics (QCD) with six species of fermions ( $N_f = 6$ ) in the fundamental representation [1]. The simulations have been performed by using lattice QCD with improved staggered fermions. The critical couplings  $\beta_L^c$  for the chiral phase transition are observed for several temporal extensions  $N_t$ , and the two-loop asymptotic scaling of the dimensionless ratio  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  ( $\Lambda_L$  = Lattice Lambda-parameter) is found to be achieved for  $N_t \geq 6$ . Further, we collect  $\beta_L^c$  at  $N_f = 0$  (quenched), and  $N_f = 4$  at a fixed  $N_t = 6$  as well as  $N_f = 8$  at  $N_t = 6, 12$ , the latter relying on our earlier study. The results are consistent with enhanced fermionic screening at larger  $N_f$ . The ratio  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  depends very mildly on  $N_f$  in the  $N_f = 0 - 4$  region, begins increasing at  $N_f = 6$ , and significantly grows up at  $N_f = 8$ , as  $N_f$  reaches to the edge of the conformal window. We discuss the interrelation of the results with preconformal dynamics in the light of a functional renormalization group analysis.

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\*Speaker.

## 1. Introduction

Emergence of a conformal symmetry and a preconformal (walking) behavior in strongly flavored non-Abelian gauge theories has received much attention. Walking dynamics near the infrared fixed point has been advocated as a basis for strongly interacting mechanisms of electroweak symmetry breaking. Lattice Monte-Carlo simulations are expected to provide a solid theoretical base to understand the (pre-)conformal nature in the gauge theory.

A second zero of the two-loop beta-function of massless QCD with  $N_f$  flavours implies, at least perturbatively, the appearance of an infrared fixed point (IRFP) at  $N_f \gtrsim 8.05$  [2] with the restoration of conformal symmetry before the loss of asymptotic freedom (LAF) at  $N_f^{\text{LAF}} = 16.5$ . Conformality should emerge when the renormalized coupling at the would be IRFP is not strong enough to break chiral symmetry. This condition provides the lower bound  $N_f^c$  of a so called conformal window in the flavor space, and we find elaborated analytic predictions [3, 4]: for instance, the functional renormalization group method [5] suggests  $N_f^c \sim 12$ . Before the emergence of conformal symmetry, a qualitative change of dynamics is claimed at  $N_f = 6$  based on instanton study [6].

Recent lattice studies[7] focused on the computation of the edge of the conformal window  $N_f^c$  and the analysis of the conformal window itself, either with fundamental fermions [8 – 15]. or other representations [16]. Among the many interesting results with fundamental fermions, we single out the observation that QCD with three colours and eight flavours is still in the hadronic phase [9, 10], while  $N_f = 12$  seems to be close to  $N_f^c$ , with some groups favouring conformality [8, 9, 11, 12], and others chiral symmetry breaking [14]. The onset of new strong dynamics at  $N_f = 6$  has been implied via an enhancement of the ratio of chiral condensate to cubed pseudoscalar decay constant [17].

Using the thermal transition as a tool for investigating preconformal dynamics has been largely inspired by a renormalization group analysis [5]. The critical temperature for the chiral phase transition has been obtained as a function of  $N_f$ . Then the onset of the conformal window has been estimated by locating the vanishing critical temperature. The phase transition line is almost linear with  $N_f$  for small  $N_f$ , and clearly elucidates the universal critical behaviour at zero and non-zero temperature in the vicinity of  $N_f^c$ . Thus, it would be a promising direction to extend the knowledge of finite  $T$  lattice QCD to the larger  $N_f$  region, by using the FRG results as analytic guidance.

In this proceedings, we investigate the thermal chiral phase transition for  $N_f = 6$  colour  $\text{SU}(N_c = 3)$  QCD by using lattice QCD Monte Carlo simulations with improved staggered fermions based on our recent study [1].  $N_f = 6$  is expected to be in the important regime as suggested by the results in Refs. [6, 8]. We also compute the critical couplings for  $N_f = 0$  (quenched) and  $N_f = 4$  at  $N_t = 6$ , and use the results from Ref. [10] for  $N_f = 8$ . Then we investigate  $N_f$  dependences of the chiral phase transition.

## 2. Simulation setups

Simulations have been performed in the same as in the study used for  $N_f = 8$  in Ref. [10]: We have utilized the publicly available MILC code [18] with the use of an improved version of the staggered action, the Asqtad action, with a one-loop Symanzik [19, 20] and tadpole [22] improved

gauge action. The tadpole factor  $u_0$  is determined by performing zero temperature simulations on the  $12^4$  lattice, and used as an input for finite temperature simulations.

To generate configurations with mass degenerate dynamical flavours, we have used the rational hybrid Monte Carlo algorithm (RHMC) [21]. Simulations for  $N_f = 6$  have been performed by using two pseudo-fermions, and subsets of trajectories for the chiral condensates and Polyakov loop have been compared with those obtained by using three pseudo-fermions with the same Monte Carlo time step  $d\tau$  and total time length  $\tau$  of a single trajectory. We have observed very good agreement between the two cases for both evolution and thermalization. We have monitored the Metropolis acceptance and reject ratio, and adjusted  $\tau = 0.2 - 0.24$  and  $d\tau = 0.008 - 0.016$  to realize the best performance.

Measured observables are the expectation values of the chiral condensate and Polyakov loop,

$$a^3 \langle \bar{\psi} \psi \rangle = \frac{N_f}{4N_s^3 N_t} \left\langle \text{Tr}[\mathbf{M}^{-1}] \right\rangle, \quad L = \frac{1}{N_c N_s^3} \sum_{\mathbf{x}} \text{Re} \left\langle \text{tr}_c \prod_{t=1}^{N_t} U_{4,t\mathbf{x}} \right\rangle, \quad (2.1)$$

where  $N_s$  ( $N_t$ ) represents the number of lattice sites in the spatial (temporal) direction,  $U_{4,t\mathbf{x}}$  is the temporal link variable, and  $\text{tr}_c$  denotes the trace in colour space. The output of this measurement is the critical coupling  $\beta_L^c$  for the chiral phase transition.

### 3. Results

All results have been obtained for a fermion bare lattice mass  $am = 0.02$ . In the left panel of Figs. 1, the expectation values of the chiral condensate  $a^3 \langle \bar{\psi} \psi \rangle$  are displayed as a function of  $\beta_L$  for several  $N_t$ . It is found that different  $N_t$  give a different behaviour of  $a^3 \langle \bar{\psi} \psi \rangle$ . The asymptotic scaling analysis below will confirm that it corresponds to a thermal chiral phase transition (or crossover) in the continuum limit.

All values of the critical lattice coupling  $\beta_L^c$  are summarized in Table 1. For larger  $N_t$ , the signal for the chiral phase transition becomes less clear, hence we investigate the histogram of the chiral condensate: The histogram for  $N_t = 8$  exhibits the double-peak structure at  $\beta_L = 5.2$ , *i.e.*, the competition between chirally symmetric and broken vacua. The critical coupling can be estimated as  $\beta_L^c = 5.225(25)$  for  $N_t = 8$ . For  $N_t = 12$ , we also observe the double-peak structure in the histogram of the chiral condensate around  $\beta_L = 5.45$ .

These results can be analyzed and interpreted in terms of the two-loop asymptotic scaling. Let us consider the two-loop lattice beta function,

$$\beta(g) = -(b_0 g^3 + b_1 g^5), \quad (3.1)$$

$$(b_0, b_1) = ((11 - 2N_f/3)/(4\pi)^2, (102 - 38N_f/3)/(4\pi)^4), \quad (3.2)$$

for fundamental fermions in colour SU(3). From Eq. (3.1), we obtain the well known two-loop asymptotic scaling,

$$\Lambda_L a(\beta_L) = (2N_c b_0 / \beta_L)^{-b_1/(2b_0^2)} \exp[-\beta_L / (4N_c b_0)]. \quad (3.3)$$

Here,  $\Lambda_L$  is the so-called lattice Lambda-parameter, and  $\beta_L = 2N_c/g^2$ , with  $g = \sqrt{2N_c/10} \cdot g_L$ . This definition effectively takes account of the improvement of the staggered lattice action when comparing to the asymptotic scaling law, see Ref. [10]. We insert  $\Lambda_L$  to the definition of temperature

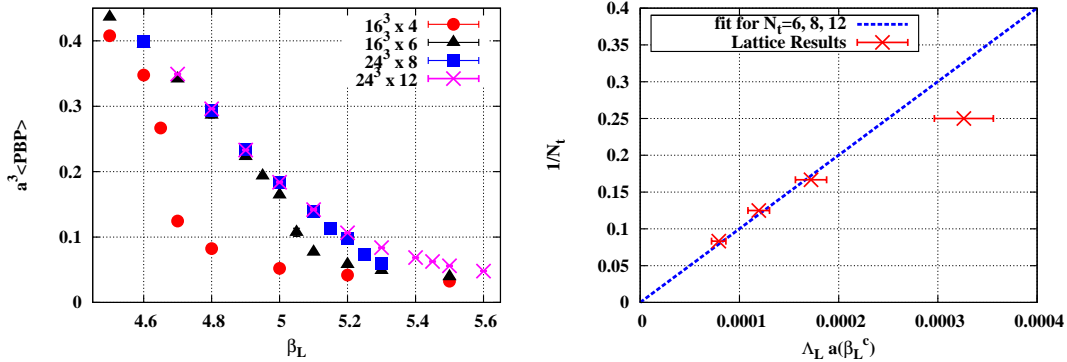
$$T \equiv [a(\beta_L)N_t]^{-1},$$

$$N_t^{-1} = (T_c/\Lambda_L) \times (\Lambda_L a(\beta_L^c)) , \quad (3.4)$$

and extract the physical quantity  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  by substituting the simulation outputs  $\beta_L^c$  for Eq. (3.4). This ratio must be unique as long as the asymptotic scaling Eq. (3.3) is verified for a given  $\beta_L^c$ .

In the right panel of Fig. 1, the slope of the line connecting the origin and the data points corresponds to  $T_c/\Lambda_L$ . The  $N_t = 6, 8$ , and 12 points have a common slope to a very good approximation, while the  $N_t = 4$  result falls on a smaller slope. The latter is interpreted as a scaling violation effect due to the use of a too small  $N_t$ . The existence of a common  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  for  $N_t \geq 6$  indicates that the data are consistent with the two-loop asymptotic scaling Eq. (3.3), confirms the thermal nature of the transition and that  $N_f = 6$  is outside the conformal window, as expected from a previous  $N_f = 8$  study [10]. A linear fit provides  $T_c/\Lambda_L = 1.02(12) \times 10^3$ , which can be interpreted as the value in the continuum limit for  $N_f = 6$  QCD.

In order to have a more complete overview, we have performed simulations for the theory with  $N_f = 0$  (quenched) and  $N_f = 4$ , only at  $N_t = 6$ . These theories are of course very well investigated, however we have not found in the literature results for the same action as ours. We note that in a previous lattice study with improved staggered fermions [23], asymptotic scaling was observed for  $N_t \geq 6$  for  $0 \leq N_f \leq 4$ . Table 1 shows a summary of our results for the critical coupling  $\beta_L^c$  of the chiral phase transition at finite temperature for  $N_f = 0, 4, 6$ , and 8 - the latter from Ref. [10].



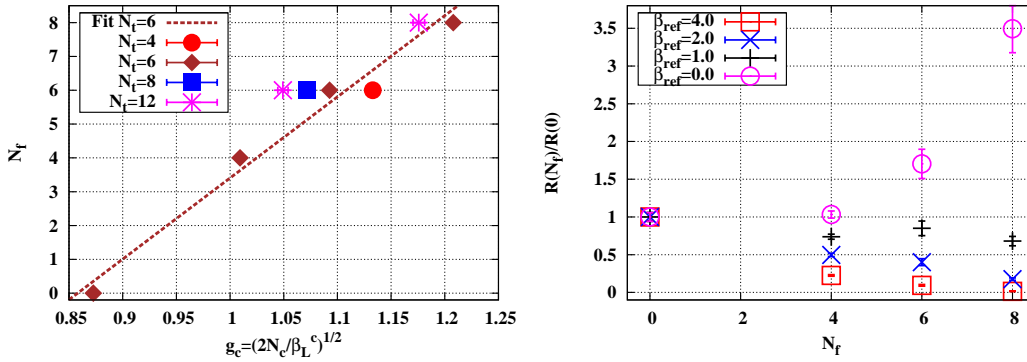
**Figure 1:** Left: The chiral condensate  $a^3\langle\bar{\psi}\psi\rangle$  for  $N_f = 6$  and  $am = 0.02$  in lattice units, as a function of  $\beta_L$ , for  $N_t = 4, 6, 8$ , and 12. Error-bars are smaller than symbols. Right: The thermal scaling behaviour of the critical lattice coupling  $\beta_L^c$ . Data points for  $\Lambda_L a(\beta_L^c)$  at a given  $1/N_t$  are obtained by using  $\beta_L^c$  from Table 1 as input for extracting  $\Lambda_L a(\beta_L^c)$  in the two-loop expression Eq. (3.3). The dashed line is a linear fit with zero intercept to the data with  $N_t > 4$ .

In the left panel of Fig. 2, we display the critical values of the lattice coupling  $g_c = \sqrt{2N_c/\beta_L^c}$  from Table 1 in the Miransky-Yamawaki phase diagram. Consider the  $N_t = 6$  results: it is expected that an increasing number of flavours favors chiral symmetry restoration. Indeed, we find that, on a fixed lattice, the critical coupling increases with  $N_f$  in agreement with early studies and naive reasoning. The precise dependence of the critical coupling on  $N_f$  at fixed  $N_t$  is not known. It is, however, amusing to note that the results seem to be smoothly connected by an almost straight line: the brown line in the plot is a linear fit to the data. Comparing the trend for  $N_f = 6$  to the one for

$N_f = 8$  for varying  $N_t$ , one can infer a decreasing in magnitude (and small) step scaling function, hence a walking behaviour. Further study is needed at larger  $N_f$ , and by using the same action used for  $N_f = 0 - 8$ , to confirm or disprove it.

**Table 1:** Summary of the critical lattice couplings  $\beta_L^c$  for the theories with  $N_f = 0, 4, 6, 8$ ,  $am = 0.02$  and varying  $N_t = 4, 6, 8, 12$ . All results are obtained using the same lattice action.

$N_f \backslash N_t$	4	6	8	12
0	-	$7.88 \pm 0.05$	-	-
4	-	$5.89 \pm 0.03$	-	-
6	$4.675 \pm 0.025$	$5.025 \pm 0.025$	$5.225 \pm 0.025$	$5.45 \pm 0.05$
8	-	$4.1125 \pm 0.0125$	-	$4.34 \pm 0.04$



**Figure 2:** Left: Critical values of the lattice coupling  $g_c = \sqrt{2N_c/\beta_L^c}$  for theories with  $N_f = 0, 4, 6, 8$  and for several values of  $N_t$  in the Miransky-Yamawaki phase diagram. The dashed (brown) line is a linear fit to the  $N_t = 6$  results. Right: The  $N_f$  dependence of  $R(N_f)/R(0)$  for several finite fixed  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$ . Here,  $R(N_f) \equiv (T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}})(N_f)$ .

Next, we study the  $N_f$  dependence of the ratio  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  and related quantities. In addition to the scale  $\Lambda_L$ , we introduce more UV reference energy scale  $\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$ , which is associated with a reference coupling  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$ . Then Eq. (3.3) is generalized as

$$\Lambda_{\text{ref}}(\beta_L^{\text{ref}}) a(\beta_L) = \left( \frac{b_1}{b_0^2} \frac{\beta_L + 2N_c b_1/b_0}{\beta_L^{\text{ref}} + 2N_c b_1/b_0} \right)^{b_1/(2b_0^2)} \exp \left[ -\frac{\beta_L - \beta_L^{\text{ref}}}{4N_c b_0} \right]. \quad (3.5)$$

At leading order of perturbation theory  $b_1 \rightarrow 0$ , we find  $\Lambda_{\text{ref}}/\Lambda_L = \exp[\beta_L^{\text{ref}}/(4N_c b_0)]$ . This equation would be analogous of the ratio  $\Lambda_L/\Lambda_{\text{MS}}$  derived in [24] for Wilson fermions up to a further linear dependence on  $N_f$  in the numerator of the exponent. In a nutshell, the difference originates from the fact that we are fixing a bare reference coupling  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$ , which will be specified later. Notice that by construction  $\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$  reproduces the lattice Lambda-parameter  $\Lambda_L$  in the limit  $\Lambda_{\text{ref}}(\beta_L^{\text{ref}} \rightarrow 0) = \Lambda_L(1 + \mathcal{O}(1/\beta_L^c))$ .

Let us consider first  $R(N_f)|_{\beta_L^{\text{ref}}=0.0} = T_c/\Lambda_L$ . The values of  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  are found to be  $600 \pm 34$ ,  $620 \pm 28$ ,  $1023 \pm 117$ , and  $2098 \pm 191$  for  $N_f = 0, 4, 6$ , and  $8$ , respectively, and represented as circles in the right panel of Fig. 2 (the vertical axis is normalized by  $R(0) = (T_c/\Lambda_L)(N_f = 0)$  for each  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$ ). The ratio does not show a significant  $N_f$  dependence in the region  $0 \leq N_f \leq 4$ , it starts increasing at  $N_f = 6$ , and undergoes a rapid rise around  $N_f = 8$ . The nearly constant nature of  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  in the region  $N_f \leq 4$  indicates that the role of such energy scale is not significantly changed by the variation of  $N_f$  (see [25] for a detailed discussion of this point.) In turn, the increase of  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  in the region  $N_f \geq 6$  might well imply that the chiral dynamics becomes different from the one for  $N_f \leq 4$ . Indeed, a recent lattice study [17] indicates that  $N_f = 6$  is close to the threshold for preconformal dynamics.

We now consider  $T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$  with finite  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$ . The  $N_f$  dependence of the ratio  $R(N_f) \equiv (T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}})(N_f)$  is shown for several  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$  in the right panel of Fig. 2, (with normalization by  $R(0) = (T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}})(N_f = 0)$  for each  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$ ).  $T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$  is now a decreasing function of  $N_f$  for a larger  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}}$ . The  $\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$  associated with a  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}} \gg \beta_* = 2N_c/g_{\text{IRFP}}^2$  would be less sensitive to the IR or chiral dynamics. Assuming  $N_f^c \simeq 12$ , the two-loop beta-function leads to  $\beta_* = -2N_c b_1/b_0 \simeq 0.63$ . The decreasing nature of  $(T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}})(N_f)$  is found to start around  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}} = 1.0 \gtrsim \beta_*$ . Thus, the use of a UV reference scale leads to the decreasing  $(T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}})(N_f)$ . This trend is consistent with the FRG study [5], where the decreasing  $T_c(N_f)$  has been obtained by using the  $\tau$ -lepton mass  $m_\tau$  as a common UV reference scale with a common coupling  $\alpha_s(m_\tau)$ . We note that we have constrained our analyses  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}} < \beta_{\text{UV}} = \beta_L^c(N_f) \leq 4.1125 \pm 0.0125$ .

With the use of a UV reference scale, we should observe the predicted critical behavior [5],

$$T_c(N_f) = K|N_f - N_f^c|^{-1/\theta}. \quad (3.6)$$

By choosing the critical exponent  $\theta$  in the range predicted by FRG:  $1.1 < 1/|\theta| < 2.5$ , our data are consistent with the values  $N_f^c = 9(1)$  for  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}} = 4.0$  and  $N_f^c = 11(2)$  for  $\beta_L^{\text{ref}} = 2$ . We plan to extend and refine this analysis in the future, and here we only notice a reasonable qualitative behaviour.

#### 4. Summary

We have studied the chiral phase transition at finite  $T$  for colour  $SU(3)$  QCD with  $N_f = 6$  by using lattice QCD Monte-Carlo simulations with improved staggered fermions [1]. We have determined the critical lattice coupling  $\beta_L^c$  for several lattice temporal extensions  $N_t$ , and extracted the dimensionless ratio  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  ( $\Lambda_L$  = Lattice Lambda-parameter) by using two-loop asymptotic scaling. The analogous result for  $N_f = 8$  has been extracted from Ref. [10].  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  for  $N_f = 0$  and  $N_f = 4$  has been measured at fixed  $N_t = 6$ , barring asymptotic scaling violations. Then we have discussed the  $N_f$  dependence of the ratios  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  and  $T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$ , where  $\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$  is a UV reference energy scale, related to  $\Lambda_L$  via  $\Lambda_{\text{ref}}/\Lambda_L \simeq \exp[\beta_L^{\text{ref}}/(4N_c b_0)]$ . We have observed that  $T_c/\Lambda_L$  shows an increase in the region  $N_f = 6 - 8$ , while it is approximately constant in the region  $N_f \leq 4$ . We have discussed this qualitative change for  $N_f \geq 6$  and a possible relation with a preconformal phase. The ratio  $T_c/\Lambda_{\text{ref}}$  is a decreasing function of  $N_f$ . This behaviour is consistent with the result obtained in the functional renormalization group analysis [5]. Next steps of the current project involve a scale setting at zero temperature by measuring a common UV observable.

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